

Symposium on Making Cities Safe and Inclusive: Perspectives from South Asia

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India Islamic Centre, New Delhi

The Symposium on “**Making Cities Safe and Inclusive: Perspectives from South Asia,**” was hosted by the Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi. During this symposium six research teams from Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India, pursuing research under *Safe and Inclusive Cities* program, presented their research findings that broadly focused on urban issues including gender inequality, social exclusion, displacement, planning and governance as well as their links to urban violence. *Safe and Inclusive Cities*, a global research program that documents the links between urban violence, poverty, and inequalities, is jointly funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development. There was a strong gathering of about 100 people from various walks of life at the Symposium, including several regional participants from South Asia.

Professor Alakh N. Sharma, Director – Institute for Human Development, pointed out in his opening remarks in the symposium that crimes and conflict are influenced to a great extent by prevalent exclusion and inequalities in access to basic amenities such as shelter, water, sanitation, education, etc. This is compounded by exclusion of the poor living in slums and other similar localities from the sources of livelihood. The access to reasonably good employment is very few among slum dwellers. The youth unemployment level is quite high. This exclusion of the poor and vulnerable groups is a major trigger of crime and conflict in the urban areas which can be restricted through access to livelihood. Ms. Cam Do, Programme leader of Governance and Justice, IDRC, also related Urban Violence with the prevalent inequalities in the urban centres. It is important to think upon the ways to reduce it and try including it to the policy update. Ms. Jennifer Salahub, Senior Programme Officer IDRC, Canada, gave a brief overview on the Safe and Inclusive Cities Research Programme at a Global level, with reference to other regions of the world like Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Session 1: Panel Discussion on “*Challenges of contemporary urbanism in South Asia*”

This session involved intense discussion on a range of issues that Urbanism in South Asia involves in the contemporary scenario. Dr. S.R. Hashim (Chairman – IHD; Former Member Secretary, Planning Commission; and Chairman, Government of India Steering Group on Identification of Urban Poor) was moderating the session. Professor O.P. Mathur from the Institute of Social Sciences, on the other hand, was quite sceptical about the way “Urban” is defined in South Asia. There is a complete ambiguity with regard to the criteria, boundaries, etc. that constitutes Urban centres. This does affect the question whether or not the process of urbanization in India is producing unsafe cities and exclusion, and how? In addition, insensitive and exclusionary urbanization is leading to creation of unsafe cities. In addition, increase in services network, growth pattern and structural changes have led to such exclusion in cities.

urbanism has a material and cultural aspect to it. This makes relating urbanism to the ground reality and connecting the term Inclusion to it crucial. According to Professor Amitabh Kundu, Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, despite the emerging middle-class in contemporary India and the country's resistance to the global recession as compared to many in the west, the urbanization proves has been slower here. In addition, some of the important questions that needed to be addressed include:

1. Is urbanization in South Asia exclusive?
2. Is South Asian urban centre becoming more unequal than rural?
3. Is crime rate is a major concern in such urban centres and why?

There has been an increasing inequality in health and education among others in the South Asian urban centres. Where rural inequality on various indicators (though high) has remained almost the same over time, urban one has increased drastically.

Talking about crime, Professor Kundu mentions, South Asia still has high number of unreported crimes especially those against women. In addition to this, the falling Sex Ratio in India and South Asia has an increasing urban contribution to it in the contemporary scenario. Utmost violence in urban areas is shown in case of girls between 0-6. Female Foeticide too has been more of an urban phenomenon with an increase in it and with the betterment of technology that urbanization entails.

A city in India is much more than a corporate entity, being so diverse and multifaceted in South Asia. Professor Sanjay Srivastava, Professor, Institute for Economic Growth, pointed out that in order to ensure safety and lessen the fear among people, relationship between various new local as well as government bodies in cities and people need to be rethought upon. In cities, access of different sections of society to varied resources has been dramatically altered over a period of time. Producing an inclusive city would mean introducing technologies, steps and alternatives that appeals and responds to the needs of different sections of the urban society, not benefitting just a particular section of society. Creating an actual Public space, that is accessible to all, needs to be thought upon. It is imperative to accommodate different sensibilities to avoid biased cities. There is a need to see whether Technology (like Concept of Smart city) solves the problem of urbanization, of which Professor Srivastava was optimistic about.

SK Das, Managing Director, S K Das Associated Architects, talks too believed that that the India cities lack confrontation in case of city planning in the country, which is highly bureaucratized. With regard to National programmes too, no challenge from the ground leads to creation of myths that things are running perfectly smoothly. Participation of diverse population in such cases is important for these programmes and planning to work at a large scale. In addition, it is very important for us and the authorities to recognize our own specificity and multiplicity in this regard, where no city is absolutely same. We need to find out whether putting cities on digital programme can solve the problem and encourage the concept of Sharing Cities.

As the session reached its concluding part, Ms. Jennifer Salahub very aptly mentioned the main challenges faced in case of South Asia Urbanism. To mention some –

1. Dealing with various (and complex) types of violence prevalent in urban areas like physical, psychological, structural in public and private spaces related to caste, gender, race, etc. In such a case, an important question arises – How do we measure violence in a meaningful way?
2. Intervening in private spaces and protecting the vulnerable is challenging, especially in case of strong cultural background of the masses.
3. Working regionally is another challenge given the political challenges that include thinking of ways to engage civil society as a whole, create and maintain regional relationships, etc.
4. The builders often do not take into consideration the community relationships while building cities.

Session 2 and 3: Highlights from *Safe and Inclusive Cities* Research Projects

These sessions involved intriguing presentations of the studies by six research teams that conducted research in different cities in South Asia – with three presentations each in 2nd and 3rd session.

The study by Professor Nausheen H. Anwar, Institute for Business Administration, Karachi, Pakistan, focused on diverse neighbourhoods in Karachi as well in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. According to this study, construction of masculinities and femininities contribute to violent geographies. Gendered vulnerability exists across households where men tend to be dominant one who works outside and earns. Gender roles are enacted violently. Women become a mirror of Honour for the family (immediate and extended). She mentions two types of violence that can be seen there – Spectacular Violence (Terrorism) and Everyday Violence, that includes those related to geographical places and infrastructure, of Disempowerment or loss of power and geography of fear (Public violence, mobility and gender). She mentioned about the Vulnerability Capacity Index that measures the vulnerability or susceptibility to damage. VCI was used extensively in Karachi and Islamabad and looks to be effective indicator. Most of the perpetrators of crimes or violence in these cities have been strangers to the victims. Stalking and Eve-teasing of girls was common type violence here. Government supervised violence, too, is prevalent here. Physical oppression outnumbers the Mental one here and both are characterized by dependency. In most of the cases of psychological violence, women have been the victims. Furthermore, in many cases, infrastructural violence was related to Domestic violence. Instances of disempowerment violence included throwing acid on a woman for deciding to marry a man of her choice. State violence involved police arresting people from a community and asking for money. Lastly, there was political violence involving state actors too.

Darshini Mahadevia, Professor and Dean – Faculty of Planning, CEPT University and Renu Desai, Co-ordinator – Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University, presented a fascinating research paper on “Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Urban India: Towards Inclusive Urban Planning” that had Ahmedabad and Guwahati as two cities for case studies. The main motive of this project was to find out the pathways through which exclusive urban planning and governance lead to different types of violence on the poor and by the poor.

The Meta findings indicated the different types of violence experienced in these cities, which are:

1. Structural violence that includes deprivation, impoverishment, marginalization, infrastructural violence, due to urban planning and policies that exclude the urban poor and lower-income groups. It is also called Indirect Violence.
2. Direct violence includes self-inflicted violence, domestic & interpersonal violence, group violence, institutional violence, etc.
3. Conflict, which is defined as “situations where individuals and groups have incongruent interests that are contradictory and potentially mutually exclusive” (Moser & Horn 2011). Conflict, when not resolved, tips over into (direct) violence.
4. Crime (some types are direct violence) that includes murders, thefts, sexual harassment, operating illicit businesses.
5. There is also a prevalence of day-to-day experience of violence.
6. Contrasting with Latin American situation of violence from large exclusions from capitalist economy and prevalence of ‘illegal economic activities’ and middle-eastern violence related to extremisms.

It was found in this research that much of the resources in many areas of these cities were captured by the elites, making the people more vulnerable. There was a tendency of subversion of welfare state, while the state seemed weak. Many non-state actors (local leaders and authorities) tend to govern on the threat of violence.

Bombay Hotel in Ahmadabad, which is a Muslim locality that emerged after the Godhra Riots of 2002, has seen the emergence of lower middle-class Muslims. These Muslims live in sub-standard conditions currently. Here, the Town planning scheme was not implemented efficiently with delays and improper design of the same. Exclusion of the concerned people at the ground make matters worse and leads to conflicts among people as well as between state and the people. In the case of Guwahati, there too has been constant tiff between state and the people, as found on the rights as well as settlements on the land.

Institute for Human Development conducted a research in various slums in the cities of Patna and Delhi. As Bhim Reddy, Associate Fellow, IHD and Manoj Bandan, Senior Research Associate, presented the findings of the research, it came out that most of the people in Slums live in deteriorating living conditions with completely unsatisfactory access to housing, proper

toilet facilities, decent Health facilities, Education and employment as compared to other localities of the city. Such unavailability of some of the basic facilities correlates with increase in violence.

Conflicts in slums are often infrastructural by nature. Toilets, open defecation, drainage, garbage, water, washing utensils and clothes outside home among many other reasons, become some of the major sources of conflict here. One can also witness a great deal of collectivisation of conflicts with great involvement of neighbours in those. Varied types of crimes have been evident in different slum areas of these cities.

The state's apathy with regard to problems in such places, along with their excessive negative penetration into slums and inadequate positive state programmes, leads to growing dissatisfaction among the slum dwellers. Severe insecurities exist among the residents due to the crime rates in slums as well as in the city in general. There exist insecurities about murder, kidnapping and theft in Patna, while in Delhi, it is about theft and rape.

Many crimes in such places tend to go unreported, especially those against women. Soft Crimes like staring and whistling often remain ignored, while moderate crimes like stalking are only reported to the family and friends. It is only some of the grave crimes like sexual assault in any way that is informed about to the police.

Without adequate support from the authorities, safety often entails compromise especially in case of the girls. To avoid crime, women tend to be very selective in responding to perpetrators, ensure they are 'appropriately' dressed. Often they have to use selective routes, avoid deserted areas during odd hours, take the most 'appropriate' mode of transportation, move in groups, taking busy routes while travelling at odd hours, share information regarding whereabouts with family and friends and secure helpline numbers.

Discussion after the Presentations

Professor Sujata Patel, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, pointed out we should move beyond discussing about cities and non-cities and talk of territories in general, since movement of people is across different places beyond just cities. It is after this one needs to think about what is unique in each territory and space in order to understand insecurity and conflict. There exist conflicts between diverse identities based on caste, class, gender. These lead to insecurity. The increasing distance between the state and the people need to be addressed in the contemporary period in order to promote inclusivity in cities.

According to Kalpana Viswanath, JAGORI, New Delhi, there is an increasing violence and vulnerability in the cities. Within this, gender is a central component of insecurity in South Asia. She questions whether safety or security is a better term to use in case of the urban context. The term "Security" entails a bigger baggage while "safety" turns apolitical at times. In such a case, "Vulnerability" is important here, particularly to be used at the micro-level.

Creating inclusive cities is a challenge in South Asia which is filled with peculiar concerns. There are high rates of violence in many cities in India. Gender Violence in particular have been high not just in India but also in South Asia in general. Most of the women have experienced some form of violence at some point. Therefore, it is important to take the conceptualization of a city very carefully.

The pressing concern that stays in such a scenario is – How to address continuous, everyday violence in cities? It is important to understand the things we need to look at to get a holistic view of violence.

The concerned authorities and people have to identify who we are building the city for. Goal of inclusive public space is a challenge and finding ways to create a “public” space, which is for all, is important. Different categories of violence need to be understood contextually.

Rashmi Singh, UT Civil Services and National Convenor, National Forum for Action on Convergence, was of the view that the role of state is crucial to economic development and growth, but taking care of inclusive growth and justice is also a challenge. Justice needs to be addressed to reduce inequality. Governance challenge comes into play where violence is stemming from different socio-cultural, political levels. Understanding vulnerability is also another difficult task.

Active engagement of government with the community plays an important role in inclusive growth. In addition, it is imperative for the government to engage with the civil society in general to bring peripheral voices to the mainstream and count them as separate identities and voices.

The discussion soon after the 3rd session also emphasised that it is important to understand the city’s creation to understand violence. For instance, nature, context and intensity of violence is different in Ahmedabad and Kochi. A robust definition of violence is what is needed in terms of a framework in order to understand these different cities. Modern Planning needs to be inclusive, unlike the earlier or ancient State/Government Planning which was exclusive. In such a case, how responsive are the institutions to the poor are important.

D. N. Gautam, Former Director General of Police, Bihar, mentions that violence is always public and government has an important role in dealing with it. On the other hand, according to K. Ramachandran, people themselves have an important role to play in making themselves safe. Safe neighbourhoods will solve many problems. In such a case Gated neighbourhoods can solve much of the problem. There are many ways to look for safety and inclusiveness in the cities.

Session 4:

These presentations and discussions were followed by a short documentary by IHD titled “The Divided Cities” based on its Research findings related to urban conflict in Delhi and Patna. It

was in turn followed by a concluding and engaging round table on “Emerging Perspective on Making Cities Safe and Inclusive” with Ms. Ritul Joshi, an independent Media Consultant, as the moderator and noted social activists and media commentators.

The symposium ended with a closing remarks and Vote of Thanks by Navsharan Singh, Senior Program Specialist, Governance, Security and Justice – IDRC, Asia and Professor Preet Rustagi, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi.